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FOREIGN DEPARTMENT



IN CHARGE OF
LAVINIA L. DOCK

THE BORDEAUX SCHOOLS OF NURSING

WITHOUT a doubt, one of the most important landmarks in the modern history of hospitals and nursing was the thesis presented by Dr. Anna Hamilton to the faculty of the University in Montpellier, when, her medical course of four years or more completed, she presented herself for her degree in medicine.

This thesis is really a history of nursing, orders and systems, a volume of considerable size (8° 335 p.), richly illustrated, containing a copious bibliography, and, at the time of its presentation, was the only serious, extensive, and adequate history of the kind in existence, compared to which the few outlines or accounts of nursing orders published were slight in plan or restricted in scope. Beginning with an outline of the care of the sick in Pagan and early Christian times, it ends with a careful and critical study of all the different nursing systems as found at the present time, with keen and just comparative examination of the merits of the different forms of nursing education and organization, and no little scientific dissection and exposure of faults and abuses as found by research. Unfortunately for the general public, this noteworthy book (for such it is), being a professional thesis, could not be treated as a book. Only 500 copies were printed, and even these not for sale, so that it is now only to be found in libraries.

The Johns Hopkins Training School library is fortunate in owning an autograph copy. It is the only copy in America that I know of, unless the Surgeon-General's Library possesses one.

But even more unusual than this thesis was the way of its writing. Dr. Hamilton has taken up medicine with a deeply earnest—even religiously earnest—desire to relieve suffering. But in the course of her hospital service (every medical student in France has hospital service, and women on the same equality with men) she saw so much that was revolting, wrong, and almost inhuman in the details of the daily care and routine treatment of the patients, that she was seized with a tem-

porary horror of medicine, and almost decided to abandon it. Medicine, as she saw it displayed in hospitals, showed only its gruesome aspect, for the patients were simply regarded as so much material for investigation and experiment; there was no nursing as we know it; medical students were callous and immoral; the servant-nurses oppressed and untaught; the nuns, strange to say, neither exerted any restraining influence over the students and junior medical staff, nor any protective care over the patients, nor any moral or educational help for the servants and lay nurses. When horrors occurred, they simply tried not to see.

Dr. Hamilton decided to study the conditions of nursing generally, for it seemed to her that in the daily care given to the patients lay the solution of the vexed problem and the gentle side of the medical science. If this could be organized on a system moral, tender, and intelligent, then medicine would be entirely beneficent.

She announced her intention of making her thesis on Hospital Nursing. Her friends and relations were nonplussed. Some were secretly mortified at her selection of a common and unworthy theme. It was almost like selecting the scrubwoman or the scavengers. Others thought she was crazy, while all anticipated a humiliating failure. These forebodings were intensified when her researches occupied a whole year. "What! Is your thesis not ready? What! A whole year to study about nursing?"

Dr. Hamilton studied her subject in libraries, and in hospitals, at home and abroad. She went to England and examined carefully, with approval and admiration that has never faltered, the humane, considerate treatment of the patient and the refined and beautiful nursing of the English Sisters.

The Matrons as a rule showed warm sympathy with her quest, and gave her the freedom of the wards. She spent a number of weeks there, going every morning at seven o'clock to the wards and remaining all day, watching the nurses as they did their work.

There was great excitement in Montpellier when the day approached for the decision of the judges on the thesis on nursing, which was understood to be dangerously radical, suspiciously free-thinking—the questionable ideas of an advanced woman. Upon the platform Dr. Hamilton was to read a synopsis of it, while in their sanctum a jury of professors was to pass upon its merits and give it either an honorable or a humble pigeon-hole for posterity. The chief judge had read it previously, and had declared it was impossible. It could not be presented. It would have to be entirely re-written. "Very well," said Dr. Hamilton, "I will re-write it." At this, of course, as men do (their bark being worse than

their bite) he relented, changed the name, took out a little anecdote about the pope, crossed out a few lines and became its firm friend. Only one jurymen remained fixedly opposed to it, but although he labored long and hard, a complimentary verdict was at last given. This is the story of Dr. Hamilton's thesis, which I think one of the most stirring little stories in medical annals. Dr. Hamilton took charge of the hospital which she directs (her position is what we would call superintendent of the hospital) and reorganized the nursing as she has related in her account of the work. She brought a hospital trained nurse from England to take charge of the nursing—Miss Elston. It is one of those strange coincidences that seem like mind-waves that, almost at the very time when she wrote to the London Hospital to ask for a nurse, Miss Elston, a London Hospital graduate, who had always had her heart set upon France, wrote to Dr. Hamilton—knowing nothing of her inquiry, but having seen her name in a medical mission journal which related a little of her work.

So it happened that Miss Elston came to Bordeaux, and, after having trained a crop of young prospective training-school superintendents, she was offered and accepted the organization of the second Bordeaux school, that in the Tondu Hospital. These two schools now rank with any, in any country, for careful, thorough, enlightened methods of teaching and training, and for excellent work. Every pupil learns hospital economics and administration, as well as nursing, for both Dr. Hamilton and Miss Elston have the teaching instinct and understand making every turn of the daily wheel a field for practical instruction. They are altogether admirable, and even in these few years' time have sent a surprising number of women into the work of hospital reformation in other towns. Like the early St. Thomas's, the graduates are imbued with the ideal of hospital work, and every year nursing missionaries go forth, sometimes several at a time into one hospital, enough to form its whole supervising staff, and the work they find waiting for them is exactly such as the early Nightingale nurses found, or the first pioneers in our own country.

Dr. Hamilton is in perfect accord with Miss Nightingale in all the principles of successful nursing organization and ward management, and has given a demonstration of their truth. Precisely as Miss Nightingale did in her earlier days, so Dr. Hamilton loses no opportunity of reiterating and explaining these principles. She is preëminently the standard-bearer for France of all that Miss Nightingale stood for in her reforms in English hospitals.

These questions are still distinctly controversial in France, so that

every word in Dr. Hamilton's written articles, though they may seem to us well-accepted axioms, strikes a weak spot in some one else's armor here. An especially lively tournament was the Third National Congress of Public and Private Charities, held at Bordeaux in 1903. Here Dr. Hamilton read an admirable paper on the proper training of nurses and the correct mode of ward organization, summed up in the following conclusions. 1. Good results in training nurses can only be had by selecting women of education. 2. The professional education of a nurse cannot be given by lectures only. It consists preëminently of training in hospital wards, where, under the direction of skilled head nurses, the pupils perform the entire task of nursing while passing regularly from one service to another. 3. Theoretic instruction should be simple and should accompany the practical work. 4. The diploma should not be granted on the theoretical examination only, but chiefly upon the record of practical ability. 5. The nursing staff (graduate head nurses as well as pupils) must be placed under the exclusive authority of a *woman*, trained in nursing herself and who is endowed with the authority necessary to secure respect to the staff under her charge.

It is on this last point that the swords clash and the blood flows. Strange as it seems, the directors and physicians of Europe quite generally draw a line between the head nurses and the pupils in training. They are willing to see a woman placed in charge of the latter, to teach and supervise them *in the school*, but they cannot tolerate the thought of having her go, with authority over *all* the nurses, *into the wards*, where they now reign supreme.

Thus in summing up the various reports on nursing read at the Congress mentioned, M. Sabran said: "I share Dr. Hamilton's belief that a trained woman, a directress, should be placed over the pupils in the school, but I cannot agree that she should have any authority whatever outside of it; still less can I conceive of her having authority over permanent nurses in the wards, as Dr. Hamilton desires she shall have."

One distinguished exception to this general rule is Dr. Lande, of Bordeaux. This unusual man of force and liberality, who is a physician, a member of the faculty of the university, an administrator of the civil hospital of Bordeaux, and who has also served in a civil capacity as Mayor of Bordeaux, was the power who placed Miss Elston at the head of the Tondou Hospital, where she is the chief executive officer as well as the head of the nursing.

When one looks into Germany, Italy, Denmark, Holland, to find an instance where a medical official has placed a nurse at the head of a hospital, one looks in vain, and realizes that Dr. Lande is unique.

A feature of the Bordeaux schools that is especially worth noting is the way that they avoid the pitfalls of theoretical examination. Throughout the two years' service a careful system of marking the pupils for practical ability and for desirable characteristics such as gentleness, tact, presence-of-mind, etc., is followed, and pupils whose actual ward work is not up to the mark are not admitted to the theoretical examinations of the first year. The final examinations include both theory and demonstrations, and here, again, the balancing of marks is so arranged that a nurse with good practical standing *cannot fail*, even if she does not do herself justice in the theoretical papers.

A very excellent detail which I saw both in Mlle. Chaptal's private nursing school and in these in Bordeaux is the record which the nurse takes away with her. It is, in fact, a "time-book," wherein is set down with minute detail every day of her service—where and how spent. The operations she has assisted at and births she has seen are all shown. It is an absolutely perfect record of her training, and I recommend it to our Boards of Examiners, who complain that they often find such records imperfectly kept.

The uniform of the Bordeaux schools is a very charming orthodox nurse's uniform, clear blue (but of linen, not cotton), of pretty cut, the aprons especially pretty. The sleeves are in two parts, and the half forming the long tight-fitting cuff buttons on to the upper full puff, which is made with a drawing-string or a rubber band, so that when necessary to have bare arms a very dainty short sleeve appears, a far prettier effect than turning back the cuff. The Bordeaux schools have been able to do what we have always wished for in America—they have patented or copyrighted their costume so that it may not be worn by pretenders.



“The Christmas bells so soft and clear
To high and low glad tidings tell,
How God the Father loved us well.”